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AUTHOR Jenkins, Shirley; Morrison, Barbara
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ABSTRACT

Five minority groups were included in this study of the ethnic commitment of workers. The study tested the hypothesis that there would be significant differences between attitudes on ethnic issues in service delivery between workers in traditional and innovative agencies. An ethnic commitment continuum study instrument was developed to assess cultural content in programs; mixing vs. matching along ethnic lines; and issues on decision making or power in formulating policies. The research sought the responses of workers from two distinct populations; trained social workers from traditional child welfare settings and minority workers in innovative settings. The results of the study indicated that the two groups of child care workers differed in their attitudes on service delivery issues. In addition, results were found for other items on the Jenkins scale. The entire Jenkins Ethnic Commitment scale is included in the report along with a discussion of its development and a description of the statistical analysis for the study. (Author/JP)

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ETHNICITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Shirley Jenkins and Barbara Morrison

The significance of ethnicity as a factor in American social institutions has been broadly recognized in various sectors, including employment, education, and political behavior. On the social welfare scene, however, ethnicity has been too often regarded as a descriptive variable applied to clients, often with "problem" implications, rather than as a critical ingredient in determining the positive content of service delivery. There are few systematic efforts to operationalize ethnic issues, attitudes, or positions for the purpose of improving access of minority clients to appropriate entitlements.

The need to direct attention to ethnic factors in service delivery has been raised in the writing of minority workers in recent years. It is suggested that this need has become increasingly felt, not only because of the rising consciousness of minority people, but because of the growth of the public sector in service delivery which superceded self-help groups. Although public agencies had substantial resources, they lacked empathy with minority people who had cultural patterns different from established norms. It is hypothesized that minority families are disadvantaged by the lack of congruence between ethnic patterns and service delivery.

The attitude study on ethnic commitment of workers, reported here, is a part of a larger research on Ethnicity and Child Welfare, being completed at the Columbia University School of Social Work.[1/] Five minority groups are included: Asian Americans, Blacks, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Other aspects of the overall research include studies of agencies and reactions of parents whose children are receiving services.

The research study tested the hypothesis that there would be significant differences between attitudes on ethnic issues in service delivery between workers in traditional and innovative agencies. But the parameters to be studied were not known, nor were the issues defined. Several tasks, therefore, had to be undertaken. The first was to settle on the critical ethnic issues in the field of service delivery for families and children. Next, there was need to develop a conceptual framework for ethnic commitment, allowing for a continuum. An appropriate instrument had to be constructed, and pretested. Relevant populations had to be found, and the instrument applied in field testing. The last task was data analysis and presentation of study findings.

Study Instrument

For an identification of issues, the investigation conducted a search of ten years of social welfare literature, with special attention to writings of minority workers.[2/] Consultants from each of the

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[1]This research is supported by the Office of Child Development, U.S. Department of HEW, (OS(HEW)OCD 90-C-574).

[2]Shirley Jenkins and Barbara Morrison, Ethnicity and Child Welfare: an Annotated Bibliography, Child Welfare League of America, New York, (forthcoming 1977).

five ethnic groups were utilized, and the approach was discussed in workshops and professional conferences. Major minority concerns which emerged were the need to eliminate myths and stereotypes; the lack of recognition of ethnic patterns; the need for bilingualism; and the threats to group survival. Change proposals included re-education and training, programming for cultural content, and development of a multi-ethnic service system. When operationalized around concrete issues in family and child welfare services, three main areas emerged for inclusion in the study instrument: cultural content in programs; mixing vs. matching along ethnic lines; and issues on decision-making or power in formulating policies.

The conceptual basis for development of the ethnic commitment continuum rested not only on the literature but on the historical process of the recent period. The base-line is the "equal rights" position, occasionally interpreted as a "color blind" approach. The middle level is one of "cultural pluralism", stressing recognition and acceptance of diversity. The third ideological level is labeled "ethnic identity" and it calls for active promotion of differences and tends to be separatist rather than integrationist.

The instrument was designed to require forced choices from the respondent on a series of socially acceptable alternatives to service issues in own homes, day care, foster care, institutional care, and adoption. The conceptual base was the ethnic commitment continuum, and the items related to the stated service delivery issues. In addition, 10 of the 30 items referred to matters of particular concern to the five

minority groups in the study (2 for each). The instrument went through three pre-tests with student groups and child welfare workers before the final field applications.

The approach may be clarified by reference to one item, which follows:

> If a white couple wants to adopt a Black child, you would explore motives and evaluate the home, and if both are acceptable (check one):
>
> a) approve the adoption
> b) allow the adoption only if no Black homes are available
> c) not approve the adoption as not in the best interests of the child

This is considered to be a mixing-matching item, in the field of adoption, with specific reference to Blacks, and responses can be scored on the ethnic commitment continuum from the "equal rights" to the "ethnic identity" positions.

Populations Studied

The research sought the responses of workers from two distinct populations. The first was a sample of trained social workers from traditional child welfare settings. This was accomplished by utilizing the entire NASW membership list of social workers who identified child welfare as their field of practice. A mailing was done to 2,733 such workers, and the final response, after follow-up, was from 1,606 workers, approximately 60 percent. Respondents were representative of the total on sex and national geographic distribution. This comprised the national sample.

The second sample, primarily minority workers in innovative settings, could not be obtained from a single base, but was developed as a purposive sample. In the course of the first phase of the research, the study of "ethnic agencies," 54 programs and agencies serving the five minority groups in California, New York, Arizona, Texas, North Carolina and Pennsylvania were visited and studied by the research group. All were reported to be innovative and committed to minority children. The staffs of these 54 agencies agreed to cooperate in the attitude study, and a total of 583 responses were obtained, comprising the "ethnic agency" sample.

There were important differences between the two samples on a number of variables. The national sample was 88.5 percent white, the median age was 41 years, 89 percent had MSW or higher degrees, the median family income was just over $18,000, the median time in practice was just over 10 years, and the majority had less experience in working with minority than with white children. On the other hand in the ethnic agency sample only 27 percent were white, and there were at least 60 workers from each of the five ethnic minorities, the median age was 30 years, only 17 percent had graduate social work degrees, the median family income was about $10,500, the median time in practice was just under 5 years, and 81 percent had worked only or "more" with minority children. A further difference was in the alienation scores achieved, as measured by the Srole anomie scale. These were on a direct continuum by ethnicity and sample: the lowest alienation scores from white workers in the national sample; next, white workers in the ethnic agencies,

next highest were ethnic workers in the national sample, and highest alienation was of ethnic workers in the ethnic agencies.

The obvious contrast between the two samples reflect some of the differences between innovative and traditional service settings. In the statistical analysis, differences in characteristics were controlled for in a variety of ways by holding demographic variables constant. But ideological differences still emerged, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Study Findings

Data analysis began with descriptive material on actual returns, then analysis of the relevance of several critical variables such as sample, credentials and ethnicity to attitudinal responses. An item analysis was undertaken to determine reliability and validity, and from this a shorter 9-item scale on ethnic commitment was derived. Finally, a multiple regression analysis was undertaken to determine how much of the obtained variance could be attributed to selected relevant variables.

For the responses analyzed the findings are clear in showing where different segments of the field stand on a series of delivery issues. On the ideological level overall the field takes a position somewhat between "equal rights" and "cultural pluralism," with a recognizable but minority response for "ethnic identity". Workers in ethnic agencies are further in the direction of ethnic commitment than are respondents from the national sample, with significant differences found on 28 of 30 items on the instrument.

On the contextual issues, items dealing with cultural content did not discriminate as strongly as did mixing-matching items. For example,

on the cultural issue of language one item was that bilingualism for a young child is a) confusing or b) an advantage. In the national sample 16 percent said it was confusing, 84 percent said it was an advantage. In the ethnic sample, the percentages were 15 and 85 percent respectively, almost identical responses. The largest significant differences occurred on mixing-matching items such as one related to training. The item offered the choice of whether social workers are more likely to be helpful if a) they have degrees or b) they are of the same ethnic group as the client. Seventy-nine percent of the national sample opted for the degree, 21 percent for the matching of client and worker. In the ethnic agency sample, however, degree was chosen by only 62 percent, and the matching of client and worker by 38 percent.

Not only were differences more significant on mixing-matching items, there was higher reliability on these issues. Cultural items showed less divergence, and in some cases there was a reversal of hypothesized responses. One item, for example, was that lunch in a day care center should a) be a balanced meal or b) include foods like those served at home. It was hypothesized that the latter would be the ethnic response, but the balanced meal was chosen by 50 percent in the national sample, and 52 percent of workers in ethnic agencies.

For this and a few other items, such as learning to compete, the interpretation was that the assumed direction was a romanticized view of the ethnic position, and that reality testing led to the traditional option. Ethnic workers, for example, may know poverty rations at closer hand, leading them to choose a balanced meal over ethnic food for

children. Since the items were not manufactured from imagination by the researchers, but derived from the review of the ethnic literature, the conclusion is that there is a continuing need to test out ideological material in empirical settings.

On questions of power and decision-making, the lines are not clearly drawn. One key item with three possible choices, for example, was on attitudes to members of minority groups who wish to run separate programs for their children. About the same small percent of respondents in the national sample and from ethnic agencies, 19 and 16 percent respectively, said that separate programs should be discouraged. The real difference between the samples was on how such programs should be supported. Thirty percent in the national, and 19 percent in the ethnic agency sample said programs should be allowed but not given public funds. The third response, that separate programs should both be encouraged and given public funds, was chosen by 51 percent of the national sample and 65 percent in ethnic agencies, a significantly different response.

In a series of analyses in which various demographic variables were held constant, significant differences in responses were found. One finding, for example, is that the highest overall level of ethnic commitment was from ethnic workers with MSW degrees who worked in ethnic agencies. They outscored their ethnic para-professionals significantly, indicating that social work schools do not necessarily "train out" ethnic commitment. It should be noted that there is a self-selection process at work--the trained ethnic social worker usually has job options, and when the choice is for the innovative ethnic agency the commitment probably

is already there. Nonetheless the fact that they respond with higher commitment than their non-professional colleagues is of interest. Related may be a clearer conceptualization and sharper definition of the issues on the part of the trained workers.

Intra-ethnic differences were analyzed, and they showed that, although there is an underlying structure of responses, issues are often seen in different ways, depending on how specific they are to each group. Blacks, for example with their significantly higher numbers of credentialed workers, were relatively less committed to ethnicity as against training than were other groups. Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and Asian Americans were all heavily committed to bilingualism, but when the item specifically referred to the Spanish language the Asian American group defected. The interpretation is that there is an across-the-board ethnic commitment on the part of the ethnic agency respondents, significantly different from the national sample, but that intra-ethnic differences do exist. These are related to specific issues experienced by the group in question, and responses reflect situations, needs, and historical referents for each group. Overall, intra-ethnic agreement was highest on mixing-matching items, very low on cultural items, and absent on decision-power items.

Item criterion correlations were undertaken on all 30 items to study validity and reliability.[1/] It was found the application to the

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[1]The procedure followed was based on the method proposed by George W. Bohrnstedt, "A Quick Method for Determining the Reliability and Validity of Multiple-Item Scales," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, August 1969.

ethnic agency sample produced positive although low intercorrelations, satisfactory for this type of diverse content. The national sample was more heterogeneous and fewer items showed appropriate validity. It was decided to eliminate ambiguous items and those with low validity, and to select items with satisfactory intercorrelations which appeared in both trials. From these two modified sub-scales were developed, one with nine items, and the other with five items. The statistical analysis showed the reduced scales of both 5 and 9 items had sufficient validity, with positive intercorrelations with scale scores, but that Scale 9 has substantially higher reliability as measured by the Cronbach alpha scores of .577 for the ethnic agency and .521 for the national sample. The items included in the abbreviated scales give heavy stress to mixing-matching issues, with only one cultural issue included relative to ethnic practice, and no items on power or decision-making.

Since inspection of scale scores showed a skewed distribution, the scale score square roots were also utilized in the regression analysis.[1/] Multiple regression based on the scale score square roots for the ethnic agency sample showed the following regressors to have beta weights over .10;

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[1]The dependent variables in the regression procedure were the two sub-scales of the larger thirty-item questionnaire (i.e., Scale 9 and Scale 5). There were nine demographic variables entered as regressors, seven of which were entered as dummy variables. They were selected on the basis of data obtained and relevance for the study. A regression procedure with hierarchial inclusion was used with regressors entered in the following predetermined order: alienation score of worker; ethnicity of worker; setting of worker's agency; region of country in which worker resides; credentials of worker; professional status of the worker in the agency; type of area in which worker resides (rural-urban); age of worker; and income of worker. Separate regression procedures were run for each sample, both using raw scale scores and using square roots of scale scores.

age (inversely related), ethnicity, and working in a day care or mental health setting. In the national sample age and alienation scores were the best predictors of high ethnic commitment.

Table 1. Beta Weights Over .10 By Sample and Scale (Based on Square Roots of Scale Scores)

ETHNIC AGENCY SAMPLE				NATIONAL SAMPLE			
Scale 9		Scale 5		Scale 9		Scale 5	
Variable	B	Variable	B	Variable	B	Variable	B
Day Care	.27	Day Care	.24	Age	-.17	Age	-.19
South	.14	Age	.14				
Mental Health		South	.14				
Alienation	.13	Mental Health	.11				
Age	-.12	Ethnicity	.10				
Income	-.10	Small Town	.10				
Multiple R^2 (All regressors)	.15		.14		.06		.07

A multiple regression analysis was also undertaken for the combined sample using raw scores on Scale 9, and three variables emerged as significant predictors of ethnic commitment. These were age (inversely related), day care settings, and sample affiliation. The last finding supports the basic study hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in ethnic commitment between workers in innovative and traditional settings.

As an overview, the survey has shown that cultural issues are diffuse, and that there has been broad acceptance in the child welfare field, at the attitudinal level at least, of an approach close to cultural pluralism. On power and decision-making issues, there is a small but defined ethnic identity position, but important intra-ethnic differences. The real issues where attitudes can be identified and measured are those

of mixing and matching, and a nine-item Ethnic Commitment Scale, with appropriate reliability is recommended. This scale has greater utility on the current scene than the more abstract traditional "prejudice" or "discrimination" scales. Generalized abstract attitudinal scales tell nothing about behavior. Items such as those presented here relate directly to issues, and thus may be more useful in prediction of service delivery. It is not a scale for all time--when this issue is settled we will move on to the next. But it does identify what may be the ethnic dilemma of our time. Given the twin goals of ethnic identity and ethnic opportunity, how, where, and when do you move on the mixing-matching continuum?

Jenkins Ethnic Commitment Scale

Instructions

Below are 9 sets of statements on services to children. Each offers one or more choices, and none are either "right" or "wrong," but express an attitude or opinion. You may agree or disagree with one or all, but to different degrees.

Please read all statements, then circle the one which appeals to you most or comes closest to the way you feel. Please respond to all 9 sets.

1) a. If you need help from a social worker, you are more likely to get it if the worker is of the same race or ethnic group as you are.

or

b. A trained worker with a social work degree is more likely to help you with problems than one without a degree.

2) a. Unless the majority of an agency Board serving minority children is of the same race or group as those children, we cannot be sure the clients' interest will be well served.

or

b. If the majority of an agency staff working with minority children is of the same race or group as those children, then the ethnic composition of the Board does not matter.

3) a. One good thing about institutions where there are children from different races and backgrounds is that a child can learn to make friends and get along with different kinds of people.

or

b. If a child is in an institution where there are children from different races and backgrounds, he will feel more secure if he makes friends primarily with children who are like himself.

4) a. A minority child can rarely experience a real sense of belonging with parents of another race or ethnic group.

or

b. A child gets more sense of belonging in adoption than in foster care or an institution, even with parents of another group.

5) In placing a child in foster care, after studying the child and evaluating the foster parents, the worker should:

a. give importance to ethnicity and race in placement, but not as the determining factor.

or

b. take note of race and ethnic background, then place the child with the best rated parents.

or

c. only place the child with foster parents of the same race or ethnic background, even if it means extensive recruitment.

6) In assigning adolescent boys to cottages in a residential treatment center, you would:

a. allow the boys to group themselves together by race and ethnic background, if they wished.

or

b. place boys together in what you consider will be the best therapeutic milieu.

or

c. assign boys recognizing race and ethnic background, but not as the main consideration.

7) If a white couple wants to adopt a Black child, you would explore motives and evaluate the home, and if both are acceptable:

a. approve the adoption.

or

b. allow the adoption only if no Black homes are available.

or

c. not approve the adoption as not in the best interests of the child.

8) If you are a mother seeking services for your child you would:

a. look for a good agency run by members of your own group, since then your needs would be met and you would be understood.

or

b. look for the agency with the best reputation for high quality services.

or

c. look for a good agency where members of your group have been served.

9) The important thing in a child welfare agency is to have good practice; there is no such thing as a "white practice" or "Black practice."

a. strongly agree.

or

b. slightly agree.

or

c. slightly disagree.

or

d. strongly disagree.